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Ben and his farmyard friends. — Page 80.

BEN'S BOYHOOD.

By MRS. C. E. BOWEN.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

Trusted and Tried.



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BEN'S BOYHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES MRS. PAINE AND HER LITTLE
DAUGHTER ALICE.

N the suburbs of the country town of Bedfordshire lived some years ago a widow of the name of Paine, who, like many of her neighbors, earned a livelihood by lace-making. It is still the trade of the county, but has been greatly injured, late years, by the introduction of machinery, which supplies large quantities of lace to those who are satisfied to wear a very inferior though less costly article

than the lace woven on the pillow by finger industry.

Mrs. Paine had but one little girl to provide for besides herself. By constant industry she contrived to pay her way after her husband's death, and to continue in the small but pleasant cottage where they had lived from the time of their marriage, and which she greatly prized, because of its standing in a garden of tolerable size, — always a boon to a poor person who knows how to make the most of it.

As soon as her little daughter Alice was old enough to be taught the art of lace-making in its very simplest form, Mrs. Paine showed her tiny fingers how to guide the bobbins; and very proud and happy was the child when she was made mistress of a little pillow covered with red cloth, and a large number of white and brown bobbins, each one adorned with a pendant of sparkling, many-colored beads.

Day after day, in summer, might the widow be seen seated before her door in the little gar-



Alice learns the art of lace making. — Page 6.

den, busily plying her occupation, no less beautiful in its results than mysterious to the uninitiated in its execution. Little, bright blue-eyed Alice was often seated on her low chair by her mother's side with her pretty red pillow on her lap, contrasting its bright hues with the golden curls of the small head that bent over it. But Mrs. Paine would not confine her child too rigorously, and Alice might as often be seen racing in the cottage garden, gathering flowers, or trotting into Bedford on some errand for her mother.

Hard as she worked hour by hour, Mrs. Paine would scarcely have been able to make ends meet, and pay the rent of her cottage, if she had depended entirely on the shops for the sale of her lace. They were always ready to buy it, it is true; but the price they gave was so low, compared to that which they received, that the poor lace-makers were thankful if they could find purchasers amongst the ladies of the neighborhood who would pay them a fair remuneration for their labor. Mrs. Paine's lace being always

beautifully made, she could often secure a private customer. Especially she was known to the young ladies belonging to a large school in Bedford. They often had commissions from their parents and friends to purchase for them some of the far-famed Bedfordshire pillow lace, and Mrs. Paine generally was pretty sure of being sent for to the school at the close of the half-year, when all was bustle and preparation for the holidays. On such occasions she was allowed to go into the dining-room, where a bevy of the elder girls of the school soon collected round her basket, some as purchasers, some as admirers of its delicate contents. The first time that little Alice Paine accompanied her mother was after she had just finished several yards of a narrow lace, the first-fruits of her own industry. She carried it in a little basket by itself, and, like her mother, offered it for sale. When it was known that it was the work of her own fingers, the tiny maiden's head might almost have been turned by the praises bestowed on it, and by the number

of purchasers who were ready to give the very moderate sum for which it was offered, but which seemed a perfect fortune to Alice, who was to be allowed to consider it all her own to spend as she pleased.

Three shillings was a vast capital to a child who had never before possessed more than a penny. All the way home she was thinking what should be done with it. Every possible and impossible purchase was discussed, from a new gown for her mother to a variety of other articles; the result was that Alice should put by half-a-crown in a little box, till some urgent want arose which did not appear at present; for she was a most unselfish child, and would not at all have liked spending it on any toy or pleasure for herself. One great happiness, however, she had that day. Sixpence she took to old Betty Brown, who was always so thankful for a drop of tea when her funds could afford it, which was not very often. A windfall therefore such as Alice's sixpence was all the more welcome, and

her gratitude was accordingly warmly expressed to the happy little lace-maker.

One day a letter came directed to Mr. Paine. The appearance of the postman at their cottage was a thing so unusual that it brought several of the neighbors to their doors to gaze in momentary wonder at his red coat and budget of undelivered letters. It was before the days of the penny-postage, and the sum of ninepence was impatiently demanded by the man, who, somewhat gruff and surly by nature, seemed to think that the writer of this letter had taken an unheard-of liberty in sending him so much out of his usual course to the humble abode at the door of which he stood.

“Who on earth can have been writing to me?” exclaimed Mrs. Paine, when, having paid the postman and shut the cottage door, she examined the letter carefully outside before breaking the seal, which seemed impressed with the end of a thimble. “Your eyes are sharper than mine, Alice; can you make out the post-mark, — all blotted as it is?”

“Northampton,” pronounced Alice on examination, and with all the dignity of the lately newly-acquired power of being able to read.

“Northampton! that is where my old friend Jessie Leyton lives, who married a sort of cousin of mine. I’ve often wanted to know how she and her boy have got on since her husband died, and I shall hear at last.”

So saying, Mrs. Paine sat down to read her letter, which ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR MARY,

“I write to you from my dying bed. Will you come and see me once more on earth for the sake of old times when we were girls, and of my husband, who was your kin. I have not many days to live. My strength is failing fast. Come to me if you can.

“Your Affectionate Friend,

JESSIE LEYTON.”

Mrs. Paine was a good deal agitated by this

letter. She and Jessie had been brought up in the same village, — gone to the same school, — and had lived near each other when in service. Jessie had married a bookseller, who might have done well if he had not given too much time to reading his own books, and too little to attending to his business. He was a man who had plenty of brains, but not enough common sense ; consequently, as is often the case with such people, his shop affairs did not prosper, and customers decreased, till at length he gave it up.

Whilst still living on what his small stock sold for, Leighton was seized with cholera, and died in a few days. His widow and their one little boy were left to face absolute poverty, for her health had become delicate, and she was unfit for exertion. She struggled on for a year or two, and then disease attacked her of a very serious kind ; and now it was that her thoughts turned to her who was almost her only friend in the world, and she wrote to beg her to go and see her before she died.

Mrs. Paine at once resolved to go, and she saw no time must be lost. But it is not an easy matter for the poor to take a sudden journey. Mrs. Paine had to ascertain the best and cheapest mode of getting to Northampton. Also she must either leave Alice in charge of some one or take her with her. She decided on the former plan. A neighbor offered to receive the child, and look after the cottage in her short absence; for she hoped to return in a few days. There was a carrier's cart, she found, which went three times a-week from Bedford to a place whence she could take the coach to Northampton, and her return could be managed in the same manner. So the next day she left Alice in the neighbor's care, and started on her journey of friendship and kindness.



CHAPTER II.

BEN LEYTON PONDERES OVER THE QUESTION OF
WHETHER HE IS A "PORPOISE" OR A
"PAUPER."

BETTER-WRITING was in former days thought a much greater business by the lower classes than it is now. Alice had no expectation of hearing from her mother during her absence, and was quite content to wait patiently for return in a few days.

More than a week, however, passed before Mrs. Paine returned, and then, to Alice's unspeakable surprise, she was accompanied by a rosy-faced, sturdy little boy of about eight years old ! Greater still was she astonished when she

found that he was henceforth to live with them.

“I found that he must go to the workhouse,” said Mrs. Paine, “and I couldn’t bear the thought of it. His poor mother had no idea of my taking him when she asked me to go to her, but she said she should like to know that I would inquire about him now and then, and give him a word of advice by letter, that he might not feel there was no one to care for him. So I thought to myself, ‘Suppose I were on my death-bed, and it was *Alice* going to the workhouse, how should I feel?’ Then I began to long to take the boy, and I thought and thought, till at last I told poor Jessie that whilst I had a home little Ben should have one too — and so here he is. A nice little fellow. It was a sorrowful time with the poor child when he found his mother was gone, but he’ll soon get settled with us. We shall go on making ends meet somehow, I dare say. In a few years he’ll be able to do something for himself.”

All this was said to the neighbor, Mrs. Langley, who had been taking charge of Alice, and who was disposed to think Mrs. Paine had done rather a rash thing.

At all events, little Alice did not disapprove. She received Ben with open arms ; showed him the garden, with its various treasures in the shape of rose-bushes, creepers, etc. etc., and, above all, the tiny arbor in the corner, made by her father's own hands ; promised that he should have half of the little flower-bed called hers ; and offered to teach him to make lace, saying, she was sure mother would give him a pillow of his own when he had learned.

But Ben, though well pleased at becoming partner in the flower-bed, shook his head over the lace pillow. "That's girls' work," he said ; "*I'm a boy.*"

That he was — and so Mrs. Paine was reminded every hour of the day. A high-spirited, intelligent, restless boy, always active and eager to be doing something, but always affectionate, tractable, and anxious to be useful.

That he made a material difference in the expenses of their little household there was no denying, and Mrs. Paine found it impossible to send him to school as she wished to do. He could read and write a little, and she, being herself not a bad scholar, used to teach him and Alice evenings; and both of them went to Sunday-school regularly.

Like most children of his age, Ben took life as it came, not troubling his head beyond the affairs of the day.

When his mother died, he accompanied Mrs. Paine to Bedford without feeling any wonder that she took him with her. He easily slipped into being Alice's brother and a little son to Auntie Paine, as he called her, and had no idea of being under obligation of any kind more than all the other children around were to those they lived with. Mrs. Paine was not one who would ever remind him that she took him to avoid his being sent to the workhouse. She believed she was doing her duty as a Christian woman in giv-

ing him a home, and she looked for no other approval but that of God and her own conscience.

Ben was sure, however, to have his eyes opened sooner or later to the fact that he was peculiarly circumstanced.

The winter was a very severe one that year. Provisions were high, — coals were dear. The lace trade did not flourish. "Times were hard," was a universal remark. Mrs. Paine felt the truth of it, but said little. Not for one instant did she regret having taken Ben, and neither he nor Alice knew that she often worked far into the night at her lace pillow to earn needful clothing for the two. They did not know that she often arose unsatisfied from a meal in order that they might have enough. Nor did they perceive that their clothing was warmer than hers.

But one day Ben came in with a puzzled look on his face. Mrs. Paine was gone out to sell some lace at a shop, so he asked Alice the question that was on his mind.

"Alice, do you know what the word paupers means?"

"Yes," said Alice, with an air of conscious knowledge, "I know quite well; it means a great fish that swims and rolls about in the sea. There is the picture of one in my spelling-book." Ben looked more puzzled than ever; Alice's explanation had evidently not cleared matters to him.

"What do you want to know for, Ben?"

"Because I heard Mrs. Langley say to her husband, when I went there for Auntie to-day, that they were giving away warm clothing at Squire Powell's, and that I had a right to some, for I was after all only one of the paupers; and Alice, before mother died I remember she said to Auntie something about my having to go amongst paupers, and Auntie said I never should while she lived."

"How very strange," replied Alice; "it sounds just as if your mother was afraid some one would want to drown you, and send you down amongst the fishes. We will ask mother about it."

Mrs. Paine was both amused and pained when the children asked her their question. She explained the bungle Alice had made between paupers and porpoises, but in so doing she unavoidably enlightened Ben as to the fact of his dependent position. Some children would not have troubled themselves about the matter, but Ben was a boy of no ordinary character, as after events proved. He was highly sensitive, too, and he pondered over Mrs. Langley's speech about his being a pauper long after Mrs. Paine thought he had forgotten it.

"Mrs. Langley," said he, one day, when he had been to fetch some milk for her at her request, "what did you mean the other day about the warm clothing at Squire Powell's; would they give me some if I asked for it?"

"I dare say they would if they knew all about you, but I don't think your Auntie Paine would like to you have go for any. She's not one to ask for charity, I'm sure; yet how she manages to keep you and Alice looking as tidy as you do, and in such warm things, I don't know."



Mrs. Paine explains the difference between paupers and porpoises. — Page 20.



“Is Auntie Paine poor?” asked Ben.

“Aye, to be sure she is, and so am I, and so are we all in such hard times as these. It’s nothing but slave, slave from morning to night, and yet one can scarcely keep body and soul together. But there, child, what can you understand about it? Run home; and mind that you are always a grateful boy to your Auntie, as you call her, for she’s been a kind friend to you when you’d no other. When you get to be a large boy, you must try and support yourself, and not be a burden on her any longer.”





CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE BELLS OF ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH SAY TO BEN.

BEN walked away from Mrs. Langley's cottage at a much slower pace than was usual with him. Nor did he feel inclined to go home just then. He had a great deal to think about, and he was unhappy. It was a bright, cold day, so he put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm, and turned down a road leading away from the town. Oh, how he longed for his mother to come back and feed him and clothe him again! Auntie Paine was very kind, but then he did not belong rightfully to her, or

to anybody. She had only taken him out of charity, and she was poor, Mrs. Langley said, and perhaps she could hardly afford to keep him. He remembered several things now which he had not thought anything of before. For instance, that very cape he had on to keep out the cold, frosty air, was made out of the large cape of Auntie Paine's cloak. She wore her cloak without a cape now, and said it was still warm enough. He felt sure that she only took it off and cut it up for him because his every-day jacket was so thin, and she could not afford to buy him another.

Then again he remembered how he had sometimes heard her bobbins going, when he had woke up, what seemed to him, in the middle of the night. He had wondered always that she could like to sit working so late, when she might be snug in bed as he was; but then he had turned round and gone to sleep again, and thought no more about it. Now, however, he understood better about these things. She only

worked so late in order to make more lace to sell, not because she liked sitting up.

Just then he heard a sound as of many feet coming along the frosty road. Tramp, tramp, tramp, sounded from behind, and looking round he saw a long row of children walking two and two, all dressed alike, with their hair cut very short. He knew them to be the workhouse children, who Mrs. Paine had explained to him bore the name of paupers, — the word which had so puzzled him.

He looked at them with very uncomfortable feelings just now. He had always pitied them so. Not that they looked ill or unhappy, but because he knew how poor and friendless most of them were. To-day he felt as though he ought to be amongst them, rather than a burden on Auntie Paine. Mrs. Langley had used that word burden with respect to him, and he knew that he *must* be one. He almost felt inclined to go up to the matron who was walking with the children, and ask her to take him in with them

and keep him. He even took a step or two towards her, his heart beating very fast; but just at that moment one of the children ran out of the ranks in which they were walking, to gather a bunch of holly berries from the hedge. She had evidently broken the rules, for the matron gave her a cuff on the shoulder and spoke angrily, desiring her not to be disorderly. Ben stepped back very quickly and walked towards home as fast as he could go. He thought it would be terrible not to be allowed to run about here, and there, and everywhere when he went out. He had good sense enough to see that if it were against rules for the children to stop to gather anything from the hedges, the little girl ought not to have done so, and that she deserved reproof. But to have to keep such a rule he thought must be dreadful, as well as having to walk in that set, orderly manner, two and two. No, he would not ask to be taken into the workhouse; he must try and think of some other way of ceasing to be a burden to Auntie Paine.

"Oh! that I were a big boy instead of a little one!" Ben said aloud to himself; "then I could work and help myself, as Mrs. Langley says."

He had climbed on a gate leading into a field by the roadside, and his arms were resting on the top bar. He did not perceive that any one was near him till he felt a smart tap on his back, and a tall, good-natured looking man asked him why he was talking to himself in that queer sort of way.

"Please, sir," said Ben, rather startled, and frightened out of his reverie into his usual frank, childlike manner, "I was only saying I wished I was a big boy instead of a little one."

"And why do you wish that?"

"Because then I could work and help myself."

"Well, you look as if you'd be a strong, sturdy fellow one of these days; in the meantime, suppose you move out of the way, and let me pass through the gate; and here, hold this stick for me whilst I unlock the padlock; though you

are a little boy, you've got hands and feet, and it's not too soon to learn the use of them at all events."

Ben felt rather ashamed that he had not moved out of the farmer's way without being told, and that he had not offered to hold his stick without being asked. He received a good-humored nod from him as, having locked the gate on the other side, the tall, strong man took his stick and walked off over his well-ploughed field.

Ben noticed what large feet and hands he had, and then he gave a look at his own small ones with a feeling almost akin to contempt.

"Such strides, too, as those long legs of his can take," thought Ben; "he's half over the field already; it would have taken me twice as long to go that distance."

Just then a pretty little terrier dog came running up the road, sniffing the way after his master. He whined because he could neither get through the bars of the gate, nor leap over the top of it. He looked up into Ben's face, almost

asking him to lift him over. The boy did so, and then laughed at the furious speed with which the little creature scampered over the broad, rough furrows till he gained his master's side.

"Well done, little fellow," he said to himself, "you've caught up with him quickly, yet your legs and feet are much shorter and smaller than mine. To be sure you've got four of each, and I've only two, but then your four put together are not nearly so big as my two?"

At that moment Ben's eye caught sight of something bright lying on the ground. It was the key of the padlock, which had evidently been dropped by the farmer.

Ben scrambled over the gate in an instant, and picked it up. Although the field was not a thoroughfare, he thought he could not be doing wrong in going across it to catch the farmer and give him his key, but he must be as nimble as the dog was, or he should lose sight of him.

"Now legs and feet off with you, though you *are* so small," quoth Ben, and off they went at

his bidding at a pace that did them credit. To be sure, they failed him once, for the ploughed ground being hard with frost, and the ridges high, he was suddenly tripped up by a lump of earth, and found himself going heels over head into a furrow. But that was a trifle; he was up again in a second, and, panting and breathless, soon came up to the farmer, who seeing him running guessed that something had happened, and sat down on the stile at the other end of the field to wait for him. Ben could not speak at first; he could only hold out the key with one hand, and with the other pat the little dog, who, remembering the service he had done him at the gate, leaped up and fawned upon him.

“Hollo, little man, so you’ve taken my advice already, and begun to use your hands and feet, and in my service, too. I should have been sorry to have lost my key, for it’s one that opens all the gates. Now suppose I see what my hands can find to reward yours with.”

“I don’t want any reward, sir,” said Ben stoutly.

"Perhaps not, but for all that you won't refuse a present of a sixpence if I give it to you."

The farmer had taken out a leather purse, from which he tried to extract one, but his fingers were so cold, and, as it seemed to Ben, so big, that they fumbled and fumbled without being able to catch hold of so small a coin. At length he held the purse to Ben, and desired him to take it out for himself.

The lad's small fingers, warm with the exercise of his run, quickly drew forth a sixpence from the pocket of the purse, for which he thanked the farmer with a bow.

"You see small hands are sometimes better in getting money than large ones," said the farmer, laughing.

He looked so good-naturedly at him, as he said this, that, plucking up all his courage, Ben ventured to say, —

"Please, sir, could you give me any work to do?"

"I'm afraid not, my lad, my work wants



The farmer desires Ben to take sixpence out of his leather purse. — Page 30.

strength; but when you get larger, come to me and I'll see about it. In the meantime look sharp, and you'll often be able to find work for small hands and feet."

He whistled to his dog, and got over the stile. Ben turned the other way and recrossed the field, not running now, but with a brisk step, and feeling much happier than before he saw the farmer. That sixpence was a very pleasant little possession; but it was not so much that which had lightened his spirit, as a sort of idea that was arising in his mind that, child though he was, he might find ways and means of helping to support himself. He was nothing but a pauper, Mrs. Langley had said. A pauper he had ascertained was one who had to be entirely supported by others. So he really was a pauper, though a very comfortable one, with such a snug home, and such a kind auntie and sister. But if he could earn money he would not be a pauper of any sort. He knew a big orphan boy named Jack Benbow, who quite kept himself; at least

he paid a woman so much a-week for providing for him, which was the same thing. If only he could earn something to pay Auntie Paine every week he should be — not a pauper — but — but — in vain Ben tried to think of the word “independent,” which was the one he wanted. It would not come into his head, so he summed up his thoughts, with Jack Benbow’s somewhat inelegant mode of speaking — viz., that “he would then be on his own hook.”

Those last words of the farmer’s ran in his head, — “You’ll often be able to find work for small hands and feet.” He began to think those little members of his need not be so much despised after all.

There had been a gay wedding that day in Bedford, and the sweet-toned bells of the church suddenly struck up a merry peal as Ben climbed over the gate into the road. He quite started, for they seemed to ring out seven words so plainly, and those seven words were the very same that the farmer had said : —

“Find work for small hands and feet.”

“Find work for small hands and feet.”

“Find work for small hands and feet.”

And so they went on, and on, and on. Just those words and nothing more to Ben's ear; no others would they say.





CHAPTER IV.

COURAGE AND A COLD BATH.



WHEN Ben got home, Alice was looking out for him. She loved her adopted brother very dearly, and did not like to have him long from her. She and her mother little suspected what had been troubling him, for his face was now bright and happy as usual.

“Don’t the bells sound pretty, Ben?” said she. “Miss Powell is married to-day; and so that is why they are ringing. They seem as if they were telling us all to wish her to be happy.”

“That isn’t what they seem to say to me,” said Ben; “they have kept on one sentence all the time since they began; such a funny one, Alice, —

‘Find work for small hands and feet.’”

Alice laughed at Ben’s queer fancy; but she understood it better when he told her about his meeting the farmer, and his running after him with the key, and that he had asked him for work, but that he was too weak and small for him, but said he might look out, and find work for small hands and feet.

All this interested Alice extremely, and she no longer wondered that Ben fancied the bells said what they did to him.

“What made you think of asking the farmer to give you work, Ben?” she asked.

“Because I don’t like to be a burden to Auntie Paine,” replied Ben, his bright face growing doleful.

“You are *not* a burden!” exclaimed Alice, indignantly.

"Yes, I am, Alice ; Mrs. Langley said I was, and I know I am."

"But mother likes your living with us ; I heard her say the other day that she loved you as well as if you were her own boy."

"Still she is poor, and has to work harder because I am here ; besides, Alice, I wanted work to do because I am only a pauper, Mrs. Langley says."

"Mother would be very angry if she knew she had called you such names," said Alice, her face growing scarlet with anger.

"But she wasn't calling me names, Alice," said Ben ; "she was speaking quite kindly about it, but I did not understand what a pauper was till auntie told us."

"But mother said it was poor children in the workhouse who were called pauper children ; those who had no relations to help them."

"Yes ; and I have no relations, so if auntie had not taken me, I should have gone to live in the workhouse. But she lets me live with you, and

she gives me my food and clothes, so I *am* a pauper ; only I am *her* pauper, Alice."

"I wish you would not say that horrid word any more," exclaimed Alice, flinging her arms round Ben's neck, for she saw the little boy's eyes were filling with tears, and she felt that her own were not very far off. "You are our own dear darling Ben, and we could not bear to be without you."

The children had no idea that Mrs. Paine had, from the little back kitchen, overheard their conversation. She took no notice of it just then, however.

But in the evening, when the bells began to ring again, Alice asked her mother whether she had ever put words to bells.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Paine. "I never hear those bells that are ringing now without being reminded of my dear father's death. I was almost a child then. He was a good and holy man, and though he knew he was dying, and that he was leaving his wife and children to

struggle alone, he said he felt sure God would take care of them, and never let them want. And he bid me learn by heart a text from Jeremiah (xlix. 11),—‘Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive.’ He wished me often to repeat it to him the last few days of his life. After he was gone I used to say it to myself; and it was very comforting to think that God had made such a promise in His holy Word.

“Father died about a week before the new year came in. On the last night of the old year I was lying awake in my own little bed, when at a little before midnight the church bell suddenly began to toll the old year out, as it was always the custom for it to do in our village. Though I had heard it before every year since I was a baby, I had never felt it so sad and solemn sounding as now. Perhaps that was because the same bell had tolled for father’s funeral only two days before. Anyhow, I know I lay and cried, and wondered what would become of us. Then the verse father made me learn came into

my mind, and I said it over several times to myself, till I think I was just going to sleep saying it, when suddenly the bells began to ring in the new year with a most lively peal. Our venerable church was noted, far and wide, for its seven sweet bells.

“The sound roused me up directly; and as they rang they seemed to keep saying the words I had been repeating to myself,—

‘Leave thy fatherless children,
I will preserve them alive.’

They went on ringing and speaking till I fell fast asleep. Ever after that night I never heard the bells ring without fancying they were saying those words; and when I came to live here I was quite glad to find that there was a peal of seven bells within sound again, which I could make say the same text to me, for of course one can make bells say just what one pleases, as it is fancy after all.”

“And did your midnight bells speak the truth,

mother?" asked little Alice; "were you always taken care of?"

"Yes, my child; I was going to tell you how good God was to us all. He raised us up kind friends, who helped my mother, and enabled her to see all her children well provided for before her death. God always fulfils His promises, though sometimes in one way, sometimes in another. Often He takes care of His little ones by giving them kind friends to care for and love them, when He takes away their own parents.

"This," continued Mrs. Paine, "is the way in which He has cared for you, His fatherless child, Ben," and she drew the boy to her side, and placed her arms tenderly round him. "He looked on you as His own care from the moment your mother died, and it was He who made me wish to bring you home with me, and be as a mother to you."

She had, as she intended, touched the aching, tender spot in the poor little orphan child's heart with true balm.

Ben threw his arms round her neck, and told her how unhappy he had been at the thought of being a burden to her, and opened out all that was on his mind, as he had done to Alice in the morning. He ended by laying the sixpence the farmer had given him on her lap, and asking her to use it.

"No, Ben," she said, "that is yours, and I would much rather that you kept it to spend as you like. When you get older you will be able to earn regular wages, and those I will take."

"What will you put me to do when I get big, auntie?"

"I do not know yet, my dear; you are so fond of reading and writing with me, that I should like to have you go to school as soon as I can afford it; you would have a better chance of getting on if you were something of a scholar. But I don't see any way of sending either you or Alice this winter, as I had hoped to do. Perhaps times may improve after a while; and you are getting on a little, I think, even with my poor teaching."

Ben went to bed that evening with a light heart, but with more than ever to think about. He lay awake with his brain working away at the old query of his morning's walk, — "How could he earn money so as not to be a burden to Auntie Paine?"

He was more than ever anxious about it since she had talked to him so kindly. His heart felt quite running over with love for her. He began to build up the most beautiful schemes for showing her his love and gratitude; schemes which always ran thus: — Hard work for *him*; plenty of money earned by him for her and Alice. No more work for *them*; a pretty new house and larger garden; a donkey for Alice, because she liked riding on one. (The donkey was changed to a pony in the last scheme.) A new cloak for Auntie Paine because hers was without a cape; a new dress for Alice — and — but Ben got so drowsy just here, that his ideas all ran into one great jumble. The house, and pony, and cloak, mixed themselves up somehow in the oddest way,

and prevented his remembering what the other thing was he was going to get for Alice. Nor did he find out, for he dropped into a sound sleep, and did not wake again till morning, when, on opening his eyes and looking out of the little window of his room, he saw that it had been snowing heavily in the night, and that everything outside had a thick white covering on. It looked all very beautiful, but so cold! Ben shivered as he sat up in bed, and instead of jumping out quickly, as he was in the habit of doing when he woke, he laid himself snugly down again, and pulled up the bed-clothes, till they covered even his nose and chin. He only left his eyes outside, because he liked looking at the snow, which grew whiter and brighter every moment as the sun began to shine on it.

His thoughts naturally turned on what he had been thinking about when he fell asleep the night before. By the morning light things seemed rather more difficult to accomplish.

Instead of looking to the *results* of his intended

work, — in the shape of new house, new pony new cloak, new dress, etc., — he had to think about *beginnings*. Before all that quantity of money could be secured which was to buy these things, and enable his aunt and Alice to sit down and be idle, as he meant them to do when it came, he must find out how to begin and earn even one shilling! The song of the bells came to his mind, —

“Find work for small hands and feet.”

“Yes, yes,” said Ben to himself, pulling the sheet a little higher over his nose, as a slight draught from a crack in the window fluttered over its bridge, “yes, yes, it’s all very easy for you seven Mr. Bells, with your seven loud tongues, to keep telling me, as you did yesterday, that I am to find work, but where am I to get it? Just ring again and tell me, please.”

The bells were silent, but there was another voice that spoke in reply to the request Ben had just made. Nobody but himself heard what it said, it was so very faint and gentle : —

“You will never find work, or earn money, by lying here in bed.”

Now Ben heard that little voice very plainly indeed, but he was rather sorry it spoke. It was such a very cold morning, and so much pleasanter inside the bed than out of it that he felt disinclined to move.

So he went on lying quite still, his bright black eyes gazing at the snow, and watching two little sparrows which were playing on the roof of a cottage near.

Soon he heard Mrs. Paine moving about below, and raking out the fire. He had brought in some sticks the evening before, and he heard her break them as she laid the fire; and then he liked hearing them crackle as they began to burn up. It was very snug lying there listening to all the sounds, but it was a sort of guilty, uncomfortable pleasure, for that tiresome little voice kept on saying, —

“You will never get work or earn money by lying there.”

Whether it was the voice, or whether it was the clock striking eight, or both, or neither, I cannot say ; but all of a sudden Ben bounced up, threw off the bed-clothes, and jumped out on the floor.

A large earthen pan of cold water stood at the foot of the bed. Mrs. Paine was a very particular woman about some things, and she liked both Alice and Ben to take a good bath every morning. Ben liked it in the summer time ; he did not dislike it much in the autumn ; since winter came he had rather hated it ; but this morning, which was by far the coldest they had had, he looked at it with dismay. To get into that bath would be far worse than getting out of bed ! He stood for a moment shivering and looking at the cold water ; then turning away from it, he seized hold of his socks and put them on, having decided to omit his bath that morning. But then came that tiresome little voice again ; I do not know exactly what it said this time, but I fancy it was something about not

being brave, for he suddenly drew off his socks and his nightshirt, and made a leap into the very middle of the tub.

He showed himself no mercy from that moment ; not an inch of his body was spared the cold water. Feet, legs, body, arms, face, head, and hair, got it in their turns, and with such energy were they soused, that it almost seemed as though Ben were punishing them all round for being cowards.

Then came the great coarse towel to rub them dry ; and here again Ben did the matter well. He rubbed and scrubbed till he was almost as much out of breath as when he ran across the ploughed field after the farmer. But he had his reward, for he got into a delightful warm glow all over, and felt so well and happy that he could not help whistling the rest of the time he was dressing. He ran down-stairs with his brown hair curling all over his head in little tight rings of curls, and his face beaming with

health and good humor to such an extent that Mrs. Paine said, —

“ Why, Ben, how bright you look! The snow agrees with you, I see.”





CHAPTER V.

BEN TURNS SNOW-SWEEPER.

BEN had good reason to look bright. He had fought two battles that morning, and come off victorious in each. It is a pleasant thing to be a conqueror, whether it be in the case of good Doctor Livingstone overcoming the great difficulties of his African researches, or of a little boy fighting against his inclination to lie in a warm bed, and his disinclination to step into a cold bath. The consciousness of being a victor gives a sense of power. Just as Doctor Livingstone felt, after his successful ex-

exploits, that he had gained confidence and courage to go on and make fresh discoveries, so did our little friend Ben feel that, having fought successfully in two encounters against *himself*, he had acquired more power and more spirit for any future disagreeables.

“Is the snow very deep, aunt?” asked Ben, peeping out of the window.

“Yes, so deep that I wet my feet completely by only going to the pump to fetch a kettle of water for breakfast.”

There was a pump placed for the convenience of the cottagers in the centre of a large square patch of grass called “The Green,” though scarcely deserving the title. The water in this pump was so superior to what was in the houses that every one used it for cooking and drinking purposes.

“Betty Brown will get her feet wet, I think,” said Ben; “there she is, picking her way, by putting her feet in somebody’s footsteps.”

“Poor old body, that won’t save her from get-

ting wet, though," said Mrs. Paine; "a path will get trod down in time, that's one comfort."

"Auntie, may I sweep the path here from our door to the garden gate?"

"That you may, Ben; it will be making yourself very useful. You may take the brush-broom and work away after breakfast. I bought a light one the other day, which will not be very heavy for you."

"Find work for small hands and feet," sang Ben, imitating the bells, as he ran into the little shed, just outside the back-kitchen door, to hunt for the broom.

After breakfast he began to sweep, Alice watching him from the window. At first he was rather clumsy, and sent the snow flying all over himself; but by degrees he improved, and found out how to sweep so as to leave a nice clear space for walking in the middle of the path, whilst he formed a white ridge of snow on either side.

By the time he got to the gate he was glad to rest his arms, which ached a good deal with their unusual exercise.

As he stood leaning on the gate-post, he saw Mrs. Mary Kidman coming past. She was an elderly spinster lady, who lived with one maid-servant in a row of small, genteel-looking houses not far off. Ben knew her because she sometimes gave an order for lace to Mrs. Paine for friends of hers who lived at a distance. She went to morning prayers regularly at the church on Wednesdays and Fridays, and Ben knew she was going there now in spite of the snow.

She stopped when she came up to him, and looked over the gate at the nicely-swept path.

"Have you swept that yourself, little boy?" said she.

"Yes, ma'am," said Ben, coloring with pleasure at his work being noticed.

"Would you like to go and clear the gravel walk in my front garden? It is not longer than this one, I think; I was going to ask the sexton to send up his lad to do it, but if you would like the job you shall have it. If you do it well, and also brush the steps quite clear, I will give you sixpence for your work."



Ben engaged to sweep Mrs. Kidman's pathway. — Page 52.



“I will go directly,” said Ben, seizing his broom, and shouldering it with quite a consequential air, as though he were about to march forth on a mission of great importance.

“I shall perhaps be back again before you have finished,” said Mrs. Mary. “Knock at the back door, and tell my servant I have sent you.”

She went away, and Ben ran in to tell Mrs. Paine of his good fortune, and to receive her permission to go; and then he walked away also, singing again, in imitation of the bells, — “More work for small hands and feet!”

Mrs. Mary’s maid, Susan, was very glad to see his broom, but looked rather dismayed at her mistress having selected so small a boy.

“Why, you are not so tall as your broom,” she said; “I am afraid you will not be able to sweep all that snow away with those small arms and hands.”

“They are very strong,” said Ben; “and Mrs. Mary has sent me because she saw I had done our garden well.”

"Sweep away, then," said Susan, glad to shut the door and get back into her own warm kitchen.

Ben did "sweep away," and with such good will that he had cleared the front path, and the steps, and the little bit in front of the entrance-gate, by the time Mrs. Mary returned. She was quite satisfied, and put sixpence in his hand, but said, looking up at the sky that she feared there was more snow coming, and that it would soon have to be done again.

As he was passing the next house but one, he was again accosted by a lady from her parlor window, and asked if he would come and sweep *her* path. He had to go to dinner just then, but promised to return immediately afterwards. Work seemed offering itself to him in earnest now the snow had come. He ran home a very happy boy. He was busy all the afternoon, and had another sixpence given him. A whole shilling earned in one day was very encouraging. He was master now of eighteenpence. Mrs.

Paine told him she should like to have him keep it, and if he could add more from time to time, he might be able to pay for half-a-year's schooling.

This was a new and delightful idea. Ben had heard so much about learning helping people on, that he thought it would do wonders for him. Jack Benbow had been to school, he knew, and now he kept the accounts in a shop. Jack had no relations, except one who was worse than none — a very drunken uncle; but Jack was a good, steady lad, who often said a kind word to Ben, and sometimes on Sundays took a little walk with him. Ben thought he would go and call on him some day, and ask his advice about getting on in the world.

But for several days his life was too busy for him to have any time for making calls. The weather was very unsettled. The days were fine, but every night more or less snow fell. So each morning the work of the day before was undone; either boys were scarce, or boys were

idle, or boys were at school, for there was a great scarcity of them and brooms. Ben was quite in request amongst the families living in the before-mentioned row of houses. They were mostly ladies with one or two maid-servants; and, as these maids did not like sweeping snow and wetting their feet, the sight of a little boy and a broom coming before their windows every day caused many a servant to step and engage his services in her mistress's name.

He did not, of course, get sixpence every time he swept the little gardens, but the ladies never gave him less than twopence or threepence, even on the mornings when the snow lay the lightest; so that when a thaw came at the end of a week, and Ben and Alice counted up what he had got, there was in all five shillings and ninepence, besides the sixpence the farmer had given him.

Ben's spirits knew no bounds that evening. Mrs. Paine got tired of saying — "Hush, hush." She reminded him that the snow was a rare affair, and that it might be long before he could

earn any more shillings. Ben still capered about, and whistled, and sang, and kept up such a succession of merriment, that Mrs. Paine was not sorry when he was snug in bed. But even then she heard him whistling and singing by turns for more than half-an-hour.





CHAPTER VI.

JACK BENBOW TURNS SCHOOLMASTER.

ACK BENBOW had just finished tea. The respectable woman who boarded him had cleared it away, and was gone to see a friend. Jack had drawn his chair to the table, and was deeply engaged in reading a magazine by the light of a candle, when a tap at the door made him look up, and say, "Come in."

He was surprised to see Ben enter, but he liked the "little chap," as he called him, and asked him to sit down and tell him what he came for.

"Aunt said I might come, Jack, when I told her I wanted to talk to you."

"And what have you to say, youngster; you're not in any trouble, are you?"

"No, but I want to get on in life, as people say you are doing, and I thought that as you have got on, I might, if I only knew how."

"But you are a young chap to be thinking of such things for yourself; how old are you?"

"I shall soon be nine."

"Well, then, you are nearly as old as I was when father died, and I've had to take care of myself ever since. But you've got such good quarters to live in, and are just the same as if you were Mrs. Paine's own lad; why do you go troubling your head?"

"Because I want to help myself, Jack. Auntie Paine is very poor; she doesn't say so, but I know she is."

"I see," said Jack; "you're quite right. Begin, and you'll get on. Father used to say to me, 'Depend upon it Jack, God helps them as helps themselves.'"

"What can I do for myself, Jack?" asked Ben.

"Lots of little things; I used to pick up a penny here, and a sixpence there, and sometimes a shilling or two. There never was a week that I couldn't get a little money, by hook or by crook."

"*You* went to school, Jack?"

"Yes, as long as father could send me; and when he got ill and couldn't afford it, the master took me for nothing, because he said I was getting on, and did him credit."

"I want to go to school," said Ben, "but Auntie Paine can't afford to send me. I've got five shillings and sixpence towards it though, and when I have got a good deal more I am to go. Aunt says she'd rather I would save my money for that than give it to her."

"It'll be best in the end for her, and you too," said Jack. "What can you do, Ben, in the learned way; can you read and write?"

"Yes, but Aunt Paine can't do sums, so I know nothing of them."

“Well, I tell you what, if you like to come to me evenings sometimes, I’ll teach you summing till you go to school. You’re doing just what I did, picking out your own way, and your parents are dead, like mine.” And poor Jack brushed the back of his hand across his eyes as he said this. He sometimes felt terribly solitary in the world. He got up and brought a slate and pencil out of a box, and gave Ben a lesson in figures on the spot, and it was settled that, if Mrs. Paine approved, he should come three times a-week to learn.

“And now, youngster, take my advice, and keep your eyes open all day for little jobs. They’ll come if you go half-way to meet them. Boys don’t care to get them very often, or they might pick up lots of pennies.”

All this advice from a big boy had a great and lasting effect on our young hero. Mrs. Paine was very glad to hear about the arithmetic lessons. She knew well that Jack was a good, steady, high-principled youth, and was pleased to

find he was not above noticing such a little fellow as Ben, to whom his example might be of inestimable service.





CHAPTER VII.

THE RED CLOAK.

REGULARLY all through that winter Ben did his sums with Jack, and regularly kept his ears and eyes open for something which might add another mite to his slowly but steadily increasing little fund.

Sometimes he ran errands for Mrs. Mary Kidman and other of the families in Harpur Row, as it was called. Sometimes he got a stray penny for fetching milk, or cutting up sticks and wood for his humbler neighbors. But many weeks passed, and he had no more such windfalls as in the snow time.

With spring and summer, however, came better times for Ben. Jobs began to fall in oftener. The little gardens in Harpur Row wanted weeding, and the ladies soon found out that there was no boy who worked so steadily as Ben Burton. He had sometimes more offers of employment than he could accept. Sixpences and even shillings found their way into the little bag which Alice had made him to hold his money, and before June arrived, he might have begun to attend school, but he was improving so rapidly under Jack's tutorage that for the present, at all events, there seemed no occasion to make any change. Jack began to feel a pride in his pupil, and would have been sorry to give him up to other hands. Ben wanted to pay him for his instruction, but this Jack refused. He said that almost all he knew had been taught him for nothing, and that it cost nothing but a little trouble to teach it to another. So Ben's earnings remained untouched, whilst he was getting to be more forward in reading, writing, and arithmetic

than most of the boys of his age who went to school for several hours a day; but then there were not many of them who felt so anxious to get on, or who gave such earnest attention to their teacher's instruction. Reading to himself was now a great delight to the boy. He had some books, that had belonged to his father, which, now he could read easily, he devoured at spare moments, with great interest and attention.

And now came a very happy and exciting thought into his head, which brought many private consultations with Alice and Jack Benbow.

Mrs. Paine refused to touch any of the money he had laid by for his schooling, though again and again he had begged her to use it; she always reminded him he would want it if Jack got tired of teaching him. Ben one day confided to his good-natured teacher how much he longed to be able to buy Mrs. Paine a new cloak. Upon which, Jack told him that he should be very glad to go on teaching him every night all through the summer and winter, and so he need

not save the money for school. Then Ben rushed off to buy a nice cloak for Mrs. Paine with his money if he found he had enough to do so. Red cloaks made of a warm, soft material were very much sought after in that part of the country. Every well-to-do cottager had one, and it was a possession rather eagerly desired by those who had none. Alice and Ben settled that it would be a charming present for her mother, and as Alice had half-a-crown to add to Ben's store, they found that their funds would buy one. There was a shop in the High street where there were several of these cloaks constantly hanging up in a bright, tempting-looking row, and hither the children went to make their purchase.

It was a proud, happy moment for Ben when he carried the great brown-paper parcel into the cottage and laid it before Mrs. Paine as a joint present from himself and Alice, though the latter at once disclaimed all but a very small share in the gift.

Jack's aid in the affair was not forgotten. He



A present to Mrs. Pierce from Ben and Alice. — Page 66.

was brought that evening to see and admire the cloak, and to be thanked warmly for his kindness in continuing Ben as his pupil, and enabling him to spend his money on so welcome and useful a present.





CHAPTER VIII.

RIPE CHERRIES. A YOUNG ROGUE, AND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

NOT very far from Mrs. Paine lived an old man by the name of John Odell, who had a small cherry orchard, the trees of which bore remarkably fine fruit, and old John used to pay a good portion of his rent by its sale. He had a donkey and panniers, which carried about cherries in the season, and parcels at other times; for John was a sort of carrier, and might constantly be seen about the roads with his donkey. One day, Ben, noticing the old man sitting down by the roadside apparently

in pain, went up to ask him what was the matter. He found that in getting a stick out of the hedge he had sprained his ankle, and that he was quite unable to walk a step without difficulty and suffering.

“You must mount the donkey,” said Ben; “I will lift off the panniers and watch the cherries for you till you can send some one back with the donkey to bring them.”

“But I shall lose the sale of my cherries,” said the poor man; “they will not keep, and I depend on them for my summer rent.”

“I will go and sell them for you, if you will trust me,” said Ben; “aunt will let me, I know, but I must tell her where I am gone.”

Old John looked at the boy's eager, honest face, and replied, —

“I'll trust you, and thank you too, my lad; but you are a small chap, and perhaps big boys will try and rob you of the cherries.”

“I'll stop them if they do,” said Ben, laughing; “I'm not afraid;” and he doubled up his

fist to show John how big a one it was, but it seemed to the old man a very small one indeed.

Just then a man and woman came up in a cart. They knew John Odell, and, hearing of his trouble, offered to give him a ride home, which offer was gladly accepted. They promised to stop at Mrs. Paine's cottage to tell her what had become of Ben.

John gave him a few instructions as to the price of the cherries, and the way to weigh them, and then they each started off on their different roads.

Ben felt quite grand when left alone with a real live donkey to manage, and two panniers full of cherries to sell. At first he had some difficulty in persuading the animal to lift up his head from the grass he was munching and go on his way. He knew very well that Ben was not his master, and was not disposed to acknowledge him as such; and it was fully ten minutes before he consented to start on their journey.

Once off, however, things went on very well.

They called at every house they came to, and almost everywhere sold a few pounds of cherries, till they began to diminish considerably.

Ben was very hungry after a while, and wondered what he should do for dinner. The cherries looked tempting, but Ben's ideas of honesty were of the highest character. Not one would he have touched for the world. At last he decided on buying a roll at a village shop with twopence of the money he had taken, because he could repay it from his own little store at home. He did a good business too at the same shop, for the woman bought a large quantity of cherries to sell again.

"You are but a small boy," said she, "but I suppose John Odell knows you to be a trusty one by sending you with his cherries. You've not eaten many, I'll be bound."

"I've not eaten one," said Ben, and he led away the donkey.

A boy about fourteen years of age was lolling against a wall at that moment, looking vacant

and idle. He came forward, and, peeping into the panniers, said to Ben :—

“Give me a handful, you'll be none the poorer.”

“I can't, — they aren't mine,” said Ben. The boy tried to get his hand into the pannier, but instantly Ben shut down the straw lid on his wrist, making him glad to withdraw it.

“Be off with you, Mark Thompson,” exclaimed the shopwoman; “ain't you ashamed of yourself? If you want cherries, why don't you earn some money to buy them with, instead of standing about idle all day long? Not one do you deserve to have given you, even if they were the lad's own to do what he liked with.”

Mark muttered something which Ben did not hear, though he saw how angry the boy looked, and felt glad to get away from him.

He thought it was time to turn homewards, but he took a different road for his return, as, although rather longer, it would give him a chance of selling his remaining cherries at one or two houses which were on his way.

He had to go through a long, narrow lane about half-an-hour later, and when he had reached the middle of it he heard footsteps behind him, and, looking round, felt rather dismayed at seeing Mark Thompson.

"I say, youngster," said he, "I'm not a-going to let you off without giving me some cherries, so fork up a handful or two, quietly."

"No, I won't," said Ben; and he placed himself between Mark and the pannier, by the side of which he stood.

Mark walked round the donkey to the other pannier. It was empty; so Ben let him look in without interfering; but of course he soon returned to the one which Ben was defending by placing his two arms upon it.

"You don't think I can't master you, and get the cherries, do you?" he asked.

"You are bigger and stronger than I am, I know," said Ben; "but for all that I will keep you off as long as I can."

Mark came close to the brave little fellow, and

pushed him on one side, but in an instant Ben sprang back again, and held down the lid of the pannier firmly.

He had greatly the advantage of Mark in agility, and for some minutes succeeded in defending himself and the fruit. At length Mark hit him a blow over the face which made his nose bleed and rather blinded him. Mark saw his advantage, and flung open the lid; but at that moment a tall, powerful man strode across a gap in the hedge, and seized him by the arm, which he grasped so tightly that the boy called out for mercy. But mercy the enemy did not seem disposed to show him. A few questions put to Ben explained the whole affair; and then Mark got such a flogging with the big man's cane as he had never had in his life before.

"There, sir," said his chastiser, letting him go at last, though not till he had blubbered again and again an entreaty to be released, "perhaps *that* will teach you what a thief and a coward deserves when he tries to steal, and to attack a

boy younger and smaller than himself. Be off, or I shall not be able to help giving you a few more lashes;" and he looked so ready to commence afresh, that Mark fairly took to his heels, and, turning a corner, got out of sight.

When Ben had time to look at his deliverer, he felt sure he had seen him before somewhere, though he could not remember where for a moment; suddenly, however, he recollected him as the farmer who had dropped his key at the gate of the ploughed field, long ago.

"Well, my lad," said he, putting his hand kindly on Ben's shoulder, "we've given him what he hasn't liked as well as cherries, haven't we? You are a plucky little fellow; I saw what passed from the other side of the hedge; but how's this,—isn't that old John Odell's donkey and panniers?"

Ben explained matters, and as he did so, the farmer began to remember him as being the same boy that had asked him for work long ago.

"You are grown a good bit," said he, "since I

saw you last. You seem an active fellow, and one that will not let the grass grow under your feet. My house is close by ; come in and wash the blood off your nose, and get something to eat."

It was a welcome proposition to Ben, who had not found his roll very satisfying. He followed the farmer along a grass field to a substantial-looking house, with a pleasant garden in front, and farm buildings at the back.

Mr. Medway was the farmer's name. He was a man well-to-do in the world, and highly respected in the neighborhood.

He led Ben to the kitchen, and ordered his servants to give him a good meal ; and a wisp of hay was brought for the donkey, as he stood at the gate trying to munch some dandelions that were forcing their way between the stones at his feet.

Mr. Medway met Ben afterwards in the yard as he was crossing it to go back to his donkey. " Well, my boy, and are you still wanting to find work to do ? "

“Yes, sir; more than ever.”

“Now tell me all about yourself; who are your parents, and where do you live?”

Ben’s history was soon told; and the farmer seemed pleased at his wish to make himself independent, and to cease to be a burden on kind Mrs. Paine.

“If you were a year older, I would take you myself,” said he, “for I want a sharp, active boy about the place instead of one whom I have had to send off because he was idle.”

Mr. Medway’s eye glanced over Ben’s little person as he spoke, as though he were thinking whether it would be possible that so young a boy might suit his purpose. Ben intuitively felt there was a chance for him, and drew himself up to his extremest height, in his great anxiety as to the result of the investigation on the farmer’s mind. He was relieved when he said, —

“I’ll try you, at all events; tell your aunt, as you call her, that I will come and talk to her about you in a day or two.”

Ben drove the donkey home to John Odell, in a very happy state of mind. The old man was pleased and grateful to him for his day's assistance ; and, as Ben resolutely refused to be paid for it in money, he made him take home a basketful of cherries for himself and Alice.





CHAPTER IX.

BEN TAKES A STEP IN LIFE WHICH LEADS TO PROSPERITY.

MR. MEDWAY did not forget Ben. He had taken a great fancy to the active, intelligent-looking boy, who, though so young, was thus desirous of becoming independent. He called on Mrs. Paine, and, after putting a few questions to her about him, he offered to take him into his house to live for a time.

“It will depend on yourself, Ben,” said he, “whether you remain with me. It will only be a trial of you at first. My wife laughs at me for

thinking of so young a chap. She declares you will be more trouble than help, but you must prove that she is mistaken."

So to the farm Ben went in a day or two, and not only Mrs. Medway, but the people about the place, looked at him with some surprise, and prophesied that he would be of little use.

But before a week was over, Mrs. Medway and others had altered their opinion, and declared that he was worth twenty of his predecessor, though he was two years younger. Ben's duties were multifarious. Sometimes they lay in the house, sometimes in the farmyard. One moment he was shouted for in one direction, the next in another. Now he was to run off to Bedford on a message, and as soon as he returned he was wanted to fly to the hen-roost for eggs. Up and down, in and out, at every one's beck and call, was Ben, from morning till night.

But no one ever saw him out of temper, or unwilling to do what he was told; everything seemed to be a pleasure to him; till at length

even Sally the dairy-maid, who had looked at him almost with contempt when he arrived, and said master had brought a baby to the farm, declared that "he was the most useful, obligingest little fellow she had ever seen, and she should be very sorry to see him go away."

But neither the farmer nor his wife had any intention of sending him away. Ben was deservedly growing in their favor, and was unconsciously making for himself friends.

Although he slept at the farm he was able often to see Mrs. Paine and Alice, and his Sundays were generally spent with them.

Time passed on, and still Ben lived with Mr. Medway, becoming every year a more valued and trusty assistant to him, till at length he was established as his head man, and, next to himself, the chief director and manager of everything.

There were some who wondered at the farmer for putting so much trust in so young a man, but his reply was always the same when questioned on the subject:—

"I trust him because I know he deserves trust. Ben never drinks, never smokes, or does anything else which might interfere with his steady active duties to me as his master. His heart is in his work, and self-indulgence is no part of his character. Surely then I am safer with a young foreman such as this, than with an older one, whose ways I could not so thoroughly approve of."

Mr. Medway is growing old and less active than formerly, but there is occasion for him to exert himself more than he likes. He knows that Ben is as little sparing of his hands and feet now as he was when a little boy. He and his wife have no children of their own, and Ben has become to them like their own son.

Before we conclude our tale, we will ask our readers to look for an instant on a sketch, the scene of which lies in the vicinity of Mr. Medway's house. Almost within a stone's throw of the farm has arisen, during the last few years, a pleasant-looking, comfortable cottage, which con-

veys to the mind of the passer-by the idea of a thoroughly bright and well-ordered abode. Its gable front is covered with roses, which now in the summer-time scent the air with the fragrance of their abundant flowers.

In the garden which surrounds the house stand several hives of bees, the little inmates of which have not far to go in search of the precious nectar with which they make their honey, for the front of the garden and all around the part where the hives stand is one blaze of bright, richly-perfumed flowers.

Amongst them plays a little girl, who is so like the Alice of whom we have written, that one could almost fancy time has for once stood still, and left untouched the child who welcomed so warmly to her early home the orphaned and then destitute Ben.

But another figure stands at the door of the cottage, and calls to the little one in the garden to come in, for her father is ready for his tea. In the slight figure and still blooming face we

can recognize the former Alice, who has become the wife of her old playfellow and the mother of the little Alice whose feet run homewards on hearing her voice. Mr. Medway built this cottage for his faithful servant on his marriage, that he might have him always within call. Indeed so necessary is he to him, that many think he will soon make him partner instead of foreman.

Mrs. Paine is dead. Her last days were made comfortable and easy by her adopted son, and she had the happiness of seeing Alice become his wife whilst she was alive.

There is one visitor who often comes to Ben's pleasant abode, and plays with the young ones, with whom he is a great favorite. It is worthy Jack Benbow — Ben's old tutor. He is still unmarried, though Ben often urges him to follow his example.

The church bells still ring their silvery chimes, and still advise all little boys to begin and find work for small hands and feet. But as all little boys cannot hear what they say, we will beg

them to believe that the instruction they give is wise and good. Let little hands and feet find ways of being useful and active as Ben's did when young, for children as well as older people may be sure that idleness brings discontent and sorrow, and industry leads to content and happiness. Let us also remember the command of St Paul to the Thessalonians:—"If any would not work, neither should he eat."





TRUSTED AND TRIED.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT fifty miles out of Paris stood a beautiful country house, where M. Lessalles was accustomed to spend the summer with his family. It was a delightful spot, not indeed for the lovers of the picturesque or grand in nature, but for those who sought perfect quiet and pure country air. The view from the terrace of the mansion presented no striking features, and might even have seemed to some monotonous and dull. The land was very slightly undulated, and no hills worthy of the name broke in any direction the broad hori-

zon line of sky. A background of woods, and in the foreground a river, the windings of which threaded the meadows like a silver ribbon,—now hidden behind a clump of trees or between deepened banks, now reappearing, sparkling in the sunshine,—these were the chief features that made the landscape pleasant to the eye. Here and there the tower of a village church rose above the orchards, and herds of cattle were seen grazing contentedly in the broad meadows. On the one side of the setting sun stood one solitary gigantic poplar, which commanded the whole country round, and towards evening cast far afield its great shadow, broken by the hedges and inequalities of the ground. When the sky was black with clouds, and the branches of the other trees were swayed and bent hither and thither by the storm wind, the poplar stood erect and unmoved. Once or twice it had been seen to bow and writhe in the tempest, but then it seemed as if it must be torn up by the roots, so stern was its resistance. This great tree sug-

gested many curious questions and comparisons. What was it for? What was it like? Did it represent the wise man or the proud man? There it stood, solitary, useless, not even giving in its branches a shelter to the birds'-nests. At a little distance from it, the apple-tree at the edge of the road cast its shadow over the heads of the passers-by and its fruit at their feet. Which was best fulfilling its mission as a tree, the humble apple-tree or the proud poplar?

At the moment when we imagine ourselves to be peeping into M. Lassalles' park, the poplar was absorbing all the attention of one of the family, whose acquaintance shall be the first we make. He is a little boy, scarcely nine years of age, with a thin, pale, sickly face, and large thoughtful eyes. At a little distance from the house, under the shade of a great lime-tree, he is lying, not on the mossy sward, — that is a forbidden luxury, — but on cushions which are brought for him every day to this his favorite place. He is alone, but surrounded with his books, one of

which lies open on his knee, while the rest, scattered about the grass, seem to have been rejected one after another. He is not reading, but looking up steadily and long at the great poplar-tree. What is he thinking of or dreaming about? He would hardly know how to tell you himself. He is watching a little shrub, hardly visible from our distance, which grows close against the great trunk of the tall poplar. He is following with his eyes the long shadow of the tree, as it creeps round slowly with the sun, and is just about to swallow up the humble little shrub. How it has crept on again, the shrub reappears, and the shadow stretches out longer and longer over the meadow grass. Richard turns away his eyes at length, and takes up his book once more, but you see he is not reading. The shadow which has left the bush seems to have come and settled on his face.

To look at this child, you would say he was a poor blanched plant that had grown up without any sun upon it. The sunshine to his life would

have been his mother's love, but a mother's love he had never known. She had died when he was born, and with all he had beside to make him happy, there had always seemed something wanting, a blank which nothing could fill.

He had always been a delicate child, so delicate that it was only by great and constant care he had struggled through the troubles of infancy. He had never, indeed, known more than half the life of other children. The merry games, the wild adventures, the overflowing fun, the regular studies which healthy boys and girls enjoy, had always been beyond his strength. If he had had a mother's tender, caressing love at home, he might have been happy enough without all these things, but this had been denied him too.

Richard was not altogether alone, however. He had a father who loved him dearly, and a brother and sister both older than himself. But his father was much occupied, and could rarely spend much time with him. His brother went to school, and when he was at home, his rude,

boisterous ways made Richard more afraid of him than glad to have his company. Then his sister, though she was a kind-hearted girl, was brought up by a model governess, who allowed her very little leisure or liberty, but kept her very close to "her duties," as she called them. She had never any time to spare from her books and her piano to devote to her poor little sick brother, or to the ignorant children of the village, to whom a few crumbs of the knowledge with which Juliet was crammed would have been so useful. She had not even time to attend to the flowers in her own garden, and scarcely stopped to admire them.

Just as we are looking on, however, she came tripping up behind her brother, and said, —

"Oh, how nice for you to be always out here in the open air, Richard! I only wish I was in your place."

"Well, stay with me then. Sit down here by me on the cushion," said Richard, making room for his sister, and holding her by the dress.

"Oh, I should like it so much, but you see I haven't a moment to lose. It is just going to strike four, and exactly at four I must sit down to the piano. Mademoiselle Leblois is very strict. Every hour of practising must be full sixty minutes long, and four hours of that a day is enough to make a playing machine of me."

"Do you think there will be pianos in heaven?" asked Richard, looking dreamily up into the sky again.

"I really know nothing about that," said Juliet, laughing. "What an absurd idea, Richard! What makes you think of such things? I never should."

"I often think about heaven. I don't believe it's so far off as we fancy. Sometimes I feel as if living here is only like a dream, and I wish I could wake up."

"You have very odd ideas of another world. If you had as much to do as I have, you would know life is something more than a dream. But there's the church clock striking. I must rush into the school-room."

“Come back when you have done.”

“Oh, yes, I dare say; and what about my lessons for to-morrow, then?”

“Well, well, go away then,” said Richard, a little pettishly; “you never can stay with me.”

Juliet ran off, and the great poplar went on lengthening its shadow over the field. Richard had fallen back into his waking dream, which nobody seemed able to understand. He looked at the tiny, feeble shrub, and felt a sort of sorrowful pity for it, such as children do feel sometimes for things without life; though he scarcely knew it, he was really thinking of the shrub as if it were part of himself.





CHAPTER II.



WHILE Richard was lying on the terrace, M. Lassalles was busy in his kitchen-garden and forcing-house; not that he prided himself very much on the rare fruits and vegetables he could grow, but that he found gardening the best refreshment when his mind was jaded with the cares of business and of home. His family gave him much anxiety. He saw Robert, his eldest son, growing up idle, selfish, insubordinate; Juliet, so absorbed in her studies, that she forgot everything beside; and Richard, the most gifted of his children in heart and mind, sickly, melancholy, and reserved. He scarcely knew what means to use to change all this, and he found the best diversion to his over-

burdened mind in his garden. There, at least, was a remedy for what was wrong ; if a stubborn branch refused to yield and be trained in the required direction, the gardener was at hand with the pruning-knife to cut it off. Anselm, the gardener, took a great pride and delight in his work, and M. Lassalles used to like to watch his untiring industry and skill in transplanting, grafting, pruning, training. The kitchen-garden lay outside the park, at a little distance from the house, on a gentle slope with a southern aspect, very favorable for the ripening of the fruit. It was enclosed with a high wall, and entered on one side by a large iron gate, opposite that which led to the house, and on the other by another little iron gate let into the wall, which was always kept locked, because it was only divided by a ditch and a little strip of grass from the main road. The gardener always carried the key of this entrance in his pocket, and only used it when he wanted to go a shorter way into the village. No one else was allowed to come in

that way at all. Indeed, Anselm kept guard over his garden better than the dragon in the fable protected the garden of the Hesperides. His little house stood close by, and no one, not even his master, could enter the garden without Anselm's consent. He had no objection to allow adult visitors of respectability to come and admire his fruits and vegetables; but he had an insurmountable aversion to children, and an unbounded horror of the depredations, rapine, and misdemeanors of all sorts of which he held them capable. Indeed, he had proved to his cost that Robert never entered the garden without leaving traces of his presence in some damage done; and it was probably his fault that Anselm had come to regard the admission of a party of schoolboys into a well-kept garden as the most ruinous of invasions.

“What is that I see yonder, Anselm?” asked M. Lassalles, looking in the direction of the little open gate in the garden wall. “Is it a child?”

Anselm turned sharply round in the direction pointed out, and shrugged his shoulders.

“Aye, that it is, sir, — the little vagabond! But I’ll make him take to his heels. I want no boys about here.”

“Well, but what harm is he doing you? He can’t possibly get in, and I won’t have you throw that stone at him,” said M. Lassalles, seeing that Anselm had stooped to pick up a stone to aim at the boy’s head. “He can’t do any mischief by resting a little on the grass outside the gate.”

As he spoke, M. Lassalles went softly towards the gate, to observe the little fellow more closely without being himself perceived. The boy was eating a piece of bread, which, from the trouble it gave him to bite, seemed very hard; and, to give a little flavor to the dry morsel, he was at the same time crunching some very small sour apples, which he picked up from the grass beside him. He had seated himself with his back to the road, and his legs hanging over the ditch; and, from the direction of his head, M. Lassalles could see his eyes were fixed on a fine pear-tree planted at the corner of the garden, and which

stretched its laden boughs over the wall, as if to invite the passer-by to pick the scented fruit. Certain that the boy had not yet seen him, M. Lassalles stepped a little back, so that he might watch unobserved what would follow. He never doubted that the child would yield to the temptation, and only wondered he had stopped so long to think about it. He was surprised, therefore, to see him presently move his position a little so as to reach a few more of the unripe apples, and go on eating them as he had done the others, not without a little twitching of the face at their sharpness. Then M. Lassalles got from Anselm the key of the little gate, and opening it quickly, stood beside the boy, who had half turned his back to the garden, and was still diligently munching away. He seemed neither frightened nor surprised, and this made M. Lassalles still more sure of his honesty of purpose; he got up as he saw the gentleman, and bowed politely.

“What are you doing there, my lad?” asked M. Lassalles.

"I was stopping a little while to rest and eat my bread," answered the boy, not at all confused.

"Should not you have liked something better to eat than dry bread and green apples? Why did not you pick one or two of those fine pears you saw hanging there?"

"Because they were not mine."

"But if they were given you, would you eat them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, come with me, and I will give you your pockets full."

Anselm stood in consternation as he saw M. Lassalles bring the little vagabond into the garden, and actually pick him a pocketful of the finest pears; and then, instead of sending him off again, stand and talk to him.

"Your feet are all cut and bleeding, my child," he said, looking down at the bare feet; "where have you come from?"

"From Sordy, sir."

“From Sordy?” repeated M. Lassalles, who had never heard the name; “where is that? is it far away?”

“Yes, sir; I have been walking as far as I could every day for ten days, and I want to get to Paris the day after to-morrow.”

“The day after to-morrow! — why, it’s more than forty miles from here.”

“I can go a little further to-night, sir.”

“And what are you going to do in Paris?”

“An aunt of my mother’s lives there, and I am going to find her.”

“And where is your mother!”

“She died, sir, a month ago,” replied the child, in a low voice, and looking down as he spoke at a little bit of brown, crumpled crape, which was tied round the cap he held in his hand.

“And have you no other relations?”

“None, but this aunt, sir.”

“And that made you think of going to Paris, I suppose?”

“My mother, before she died, told me to go. She thought my aunt would take care of me for her sake, and that I might be of some use to her when I had learned a trade.”

“And do you know your aunt’s name and address?”

“Yes, sir,” said the boy, bringing out of his pocket an old well-worn pocket-book. From this he took a letter, the address of which was almost illegible, so feeble and trembling had been the hand which wrote it. M. Lassalles made it out with difficulty.

“My boy,” he said after a time, “you will certainly never find your aunt by this address; this is one of the streets which have been pulled down. How long is it since you heard from your aunt?”

“Five or six years, or more than that, sir, I think.”

“But she may have died in that time, or moved half-a-dozen times over.”

“I shall be able to find out where she is gone,” said the boy.

“Do you think Paris is like your village, then, where everybody knows everybody? Paris is an immense place, my lad, and any one moving from one part to another, is lost sight of directly. Come up with me to the house, and we will see if we can get any more light on this matter. If we can, you shall go on to Paris. What have you in that parcel so carefully tied up?”

“A shirt, a pair of trousers, my books, and my shoes, sir.”

“Shoes, eh! Why don’t you carry them on your feet, instead of in your hand?”

“My mother taught me never to put them on to walk in.”

M. Lassalles smiled.

“And your books, where did you get them from? From the village-school, I suppose. Were they your prizes, my boy?”

“No, sir; I never went to school. My mother taught me all I know.”

“And what do you know?”

“I can read and write a little.”

M. Lassalles now became quite silent, and walked on, just as if he had no companion by his side, till he entered the park, followed by his little *protege*. Going up to a door, which led to the kitchen-offices, he led the boy into a room in which the servants took their meals, gave orders that some bread and meat should be given him, and that a bed should be got ready for him, and then went away again. The first thing the little fellow did when he found himself alone was to go to the window, that he might gaze in wondering admiration at the great trees in the park, the bright velvet turf, and dazzling beds of flowers. As he was looking all around him he descried Richard on the grass under the lime-tree, and wondered to himself what the poor, pale, motionless boy, surrounded by his books, could be doing. Richard happened at this moment to look up to the window of the servants' hall; he raised himself on his elbow, astonished to see a strange face there, and the eyes of the two children met. Richard beckoned with his

finger, and the young stranger replied to the sign at once by leaping over the low window-sill onto the grass, with so much agility that he did not even touch the flowers and shrubs growing in the border underneath the wall. In the twinkling of an eye he was by Richard's side, who, far from seeming alarmed at such a strange introduction, looked at the boy with pleased surprise.

"Who are you?" he asked, as soon as they were side by side.

"My name is James Valmy. What is yours?"

"I am Richard Lassalles. But how did you get into the house?"

"A gentleman took me in, — a very tall gentleman, with gray hair. Do you know him?"

"That must be papa. Where did you meet him?"

James told the whole story, — how he had been stopping to rest and refresh himself by the garden-gate, and what had followed.

"It must have been papa," repeated Richard.

"But do you like sour apples?"

“No ; but they are better than nothing.”

“Better than nothing? Have you no money then?”

“Oh yes, to be sure I have ; but I was keeping that till I got to Paris, so as not to be too burdensome to my aunt, if she is poor. You can always find kind people by the way, who will give you a crust of bread, and often let you sleep in their barn beside.”

As he said this the boy showed Richard two two-franc pieces which he had carefully wrapped up in paper, and some loose coppers which he had in his pocket. Richard, who had more gold pieces than that in his purse, did not seem to think very much of such treasures.

“Have you come far?” he asked.

“From Sordy. I dare say you have never been there, but it is quite a large village.”

“As if I could know all the villages in France ! But what Department is it in ?”

“In Viennue.”

“Why, that is a long way off.”

“Yes, I have been walking ten or twelve hours a day for several days. Sometimes I missed my way, and then I had to turn back; at other times I was so tired that I was obliged to lie down by the roadside and sleep awhile, before I could go on.”

Richard, who had been greatly interested in the story of his new companion, now looked down at his feet, and saw they were all dusty and bleeding. He noticed, too, how brown his face looked, and what old clothes he had on, and then said, with a deep sigh, —

“You are a happy boy!”

“Ah, no,” said James, “not since I lost my dear mother.”

“Have you lost your mother? So have I,” said Richard. “And you see I cannot walk; I can hardly take a step by myself.”

“Oh, dear, what a pity!” exclaimed James, looking at him in sorrowful wonder.

“No,” Richard said again; “I can’t even get from here to the house without help.”

“Oh, I *am* sorry!” said James, who could scarcely find words to express the pity he felt. “But what is the matter with you?” he went on, seeing Richard was trembling from head to foot; you look as if you had the shivers.”

“I am so cold. I should like to go in, but there is no one to carry me. Papa is in the garden, and Louis is gone out; and they are the only ones who know how to lift me.”

“I wish I could. Will you let me try? I am very strong.”

“Yes, if you like; but you must take care. If you touch my back you will hurt me dreadfully.”

James, though he was tall and slight as a reed, was very strong in the arms. He stooped down, and raised the poor boy so gently that Richard felt perfectly safe as he clung round the neck of his new bearer.

“Go in by the middle door,” he said, as they came in front of the house.

James walked in the direction pointed out,

ascended some stairs at Richard's direction, till he found himself at the door of an elegantly furnished dining-room. No one was there, and Richard said, "Put me down on that couch in front of the French window."

James had just carefully laid down his burden when a side door in the room opened, and a youth about his own height, with a quantity of very curly black hair, and an unamiable expression of countenance, entered, carrying a horse-whip in his hand.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, stopping short in the doorway, "what is this young beggar doing here? How dare you come into the house?"

"Robert," cried Richard, in terror of his brother's temper, "pray don't speak to him so. He only came to carry me in. Papa brought him to the house. You ought not to insult him."

His pleading was vain, however. Robert, seeing that the boy did not move, and seemed in no way intimidated by his presence, went up to him and struck him a blow right across the face with the horsewhip.

“Oh, Robert! you wicked, wicked boy!” cried Richard, with a burst of tears.

At the same instant James stretched out one of his strong arms, and with scarcely an effort snatched the horsewhip out of Robert’s hand.

“You have no right to strike me,” he said; “I have done nothing wrong, but I will not stay here another minute.”

So saying, he threw the horsewhip far out of the window, and before Robert had recovered from his surprise, he had run out of the house, and was hurrying towards the park-gate.





CHAPTER III.

RICHARD'S eyes followed his new friend with a look of consternation. He could not call him back,—he could not go after him. What should he do? His trouble at the loss of his little friend made him forget his anger, and he turned imploringly to Robert.

“Oh, Robert! do pray run after him, and tell him you are sorry, and bring him back! He *must* not go away so.”

“Say ‘I am sorry’ to such a fellow as that!” exclaimed Robert, in a mocking tone. “A likely thing indeed! If ever I meet him again I will let him know I’m sorry I didn’t give him a kick to make him run a little faster. I owe him that,—more’s the pity.”

“How dare you say so?” said Richard indignantly.

“How dare I? What do you take me for, you babyish boy?”

“You insulted him, and hit him; but he threw your whip out of the window. He had all the honors of the war,” said Richard triumphantly.

“Little monkey!” cried Robert, whom these words stung to the quick, “I’ll teach you to bridle your saucy tongue. How I should like to give you such a thrashing as you deserve, if——”

“If what?” asked Richard.

“If you weren’t such a feeble, chicken-hearted little creature,” Robert replied.

The blow told. Like most delicate children, Richard was extremely sensitive on this point; and thought nothing so much to be envied and desired as bodily strength. He was forever contrasting Robert’s big limbs and strong health with his own puny, sickly frame, and the contrast might have been enough to prevent their under-

standing each other, or having much in common, even if Robert had been far more amiable than he was.

“You are a coward,” said Richard, flying to this objectionable word as the last resource of the weak against the strong.

“A coward because I won’t strike you, little one? I ——”

“Come, come, boys, what, quarrelling again?” said M. Lassalles, who had come in unobserved, as the last high words were spoken on either side. “What made you call your brother a coward, Richard?”

Richard told the whole story; and while he did so Robert turned his back, and began to whistle. M. Lassalles took no notice of this disrespectful proceeding, for he was thinking only of the disappearance of the boy, who had interested him greatly. Before he left the room, however, he turned to Robert, and reproved him severely for such conduct to the unoffending lad.

“How should I know that beggars were to be allowed here?” Robert replied rudely.

“He is not a beggar,” exclaimed Richard; “he is on his way to Paris to earn his living honestly, and if he had asked for a bit of bread by the way, I don’t see anything to be ashamed of in that.”

“How much eloquence you waste on the subject!” said Robert scornfully.

M. Lassalles had left the room without another word. Mademoiselle Leblois and Juliet soon entered.

“How you smell of the stable!” said Juliet to her eldest brother, at the same time taking out a scented handkerchief, and holding it to her nose. “Couldn’t you at least wash your hands before dinner? I assure you such odors are anything but pleasant in the dining-room.”

“I may surely dare to offend your sensitive nose, Miss Affectation, since you offend my ears all day long with your incessant rattling on the piano.”

“How rude you are, Robert!”

“I tell you what it is, Miss Juliet, when I am

at home a few weeks from college, I am not going to be set upon by a pack of women and children like you. What harm have I done you, I should like to know? Tell me if you can. I can tell you what use girls are, — none at all but to bother other people.”

Juliet tossed her head contemptuously, without once raising her eyes from her work.

Mademoiselle Leblois, who seldom ventured to interfere at all with Robert, thought she might venture at least a suggestion.

“Perhaps it would be as well if you were to brush your hair and your clothes before M. Lassalles comes in,” she observed.

“No, thank you, mademoiselle. I intend to remain as I am.”

Mademoiselle gave one glance at him as he was, — his hair almost standing on end, his hands of very doubtful cleanliness, his necktie hanging loose, his clothes covered with stable dust and bits of straw (for he had been filling the mangers to amuse himself); she sighed, shook her head, but said nothing.

A servant entered at this moment, bringing in some letters and newspapers, which he laid upon the table.

"Oh, now I can see about the races," exclaimed Robert; "there's something exciting in that, at any rate," and he tore open the paper.

"Are there any letters for me, Robert?" asked Juliet.

"You can look for yourself. It really makes me feel ill to look at the letters young ladies write to each other. Here, take them all!"

He threw them all at his sister as he spoke. She caught some, the others lay scattered about on the sofa and the floor. There was one for her, which she opened, and less critical eyes than Robert's might have been alarmed at the number of small closely crossed sheets which emerged from the envelope.

Robert glanced over the sporting news, which was all that interested him in the paper, and went out to report to his confidential friend, the groom.

While he was absent, M. Lassalles returned and dinner was served.

"I have brought back your little *protege*, Richard," said M. Lassalles, after an interval of silence.

"*My little protege!*" Richard repeated, in rather a sorrowful tone, as if to say, "I wish I could protect any one, but I always need somebody to protect me."

"Ah, that little beggar, you mean," observed Robert, who had by this time joined the party at table.

"I have promised him he shall not again be insulted in my house," M. Lassalles went on, not noticing Robert's remark, "and that as long as he stays here he shall earn his own bread honestly. He is to work under Anselm in the garden, and will only come up to the house when he is sent on an errand."

"I am sorry for him then, that's all," said Robert, "for Anselm is about as amiable as a bull-dog. What a cat-and-dog life they will lead!"

“Poor James!” said Richard, with a sigh. Glad as he was that his father had brought James back, his little dream of having him with him, to carry him and keep him company, was at an end.





CHAPTER IV.

THE weather was glorious for the time of year. For three days Richard had stayed out-of-doors, under the lime-tree, almost from morning till night. Sometimes he would read, sometimes make stories of his own in his head, sometimes dream away, scarcely knowing how the time passed, till he saw the poplar shadow growing long across the grass. The time of the singing of birds was gone, and there was no longer the summer sound of humming insects, or the soft whispering of the wind in the long meadow-grass as before the mowing. All this pleasant music of the month of June had given place to the silence, by which the country

seems preparing in autumn for the long death of winter. The farm was situated at some distance from the castle, and the sounds of creature life and of busy labor could not be heard in the park. Nothing broke upon the stillness but the monotonous tones of Juliet's practising.

Richard was never very fond of music, and the incessant sound of the piano jarred upon his nerves, and worked him sometimes almost into a fever of impatience. He wanted to listen to the silence, and the rattling noise disturbed him. Oh, if he could only get up and walk away out of reach of it. How he envied those who had the free use of their limbs. He turned his face towards the wooded side of the park, which he had only once passed when they were driving back to Paris. Between the little elevation which was crowned by the wood and that on which M. Lassalles' house stood, lay a fertile, well-watered valley, which went widening out till it closed with the slightly undulating hills of the horizon line. At one end of this valley stood

the poplar. No other large trees were near, but a tiny trickling stream, often lost in the grass, bathed the roots of some dwarf willows, which bent down their light flexible boughs to the water's edge. Richard was always longing to get to this stream. He wanted to hunt among the long grass for some of the great blue forget-me-nots, such as his sister had once brought him. He longed to cut one of those soft willow wands with his pocket-knife, and peel off first the leaves and then the bark, and make shrill white whistles for himself. With any other boy, to will would have been to do, but what was the use of his wishing? Even such a simple pleasure as this was beyond his reach. Yet he could not tell what was the matter with him, his limbs looked like other children's, only rather more white and thin. He suffered no pain, nothing to make him feel how weak he was, till he tried to move. Yet he could not, try as he would, raise himself up and walk alone, even such a short way as to that stream, which seemed to him to

flow in a little paradise, and which he had so often watched with longing eyes. Richard had read many times in the Gospel of the miraculous healing of the halt and maimed. Many times, too, he had asked God, before he went to sleep, that he might wake up in the morning and find that such a miracle had been wrought upon him. But it had not come, and the prayer had fallen back like ice upon his heart, freezing it towards the God who seemed not to hear. He had not told any one about these prayers and his disappointments. Perhaps if he had, some one might have explained to him that God often wants to bring us to accept His will, before He delivers us from the trial which He has sent for our good. Or, perhaps, he would have been laughed at for his simple faith, and the trusting heart of the child would have been yet more fretted and chafed.

Richard was thinking of all these things, when a voice close by him made him start.

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

Richard turned, and saw James standing at his side, holding in his hand a splendid peach wrapped in two vine leaves.

“Why, James, is it you? I thought you were never coming to see me any more, and yet you knew I could not go to look for you.”

“Master Anselm never gave me leave to come till to-day.”

“And how do you get on with Anselm? Don’t you find him a great bear?”

“He shows his teeth more than he bites,” said James. “I soon found that out. Rough-spoken people are not always bad at heart. See, he gave me this peach, which I have brought to you, because I thought you would like it. He said, ‘You can have it; they have got enough up at the house, and it will be rotten by to-morrow,’ and he almost threw it in my face. ‘But don’t you want it, Master Anselm?’ I said. ‘I should have kept it if I did, boy. Come, now, you needn’t stand there looking at it; you never tasted such a peach in your life, I can tell you,

and I ought to know, for I reared it, and ripened it.' 'I thought it was God who made the fruits grow and ripen,' I said. 'Of course, you stupid boy; but don't you think God lets us have a hand in it, too? It would never have grown like that without my care.' So saying he walked away, but turned back again to say, 'If I had once seen you so much as look at one fruit on the tree, I should have given you another sort of treating from this, I can tell you.' You know old Master Anselm, Mr. Richard?"

"Very little; I have always heard that he is very churlish and rough, so when he comes into the park I pretend not to see him, or only just say good-morning."

"Then that's why he says you are so proud; I told him you were not, but he would not believe me."

"And do you find it very bad to live with him?"

"Oh, no; I like it. He is so lonely and dull at nights. I think, if he once begins to love me,

he will be happier. Is there nothing I can do for you now, Mr. Richard ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Richard, afraid his companion was going to leave him. “ Sit down here by me, and I will tell you. I am not going to eat your beautiful peach all by myself ; we will have it between us, and talk while we eat it.”

While they were despatching the delicious fruit, Richard showed James the low meadow where the osiers grew, and told him how much he wished to go there.

“ Is that all ? ” replied the other lad. “ I can easily carry you there.”

“ Oh, I am sure you couldn’t.”

“ Why not ? Never you fear ; I won’t let you fall.”

“ But I am a great deal too heavy for you.”

“ You heavy ? ” said James, with a smile, glancing at the little wasted limbs. “ Why, I could carry twice your weight.”

“ But perhaps Anselm will scold if you stay.”

“ Oh, he is gone down to the village. He told

me to dig up one bed, but I can do that this evening, after work hours. Now, then, let's go. Nothing venture, nothing have. Put your two arms well round my neck. Now, then, up! Are you all right? I will hold fast, and so do you. Does it tire you to clasp your arms round my neck?"

"Oh no; I have more strength in my arms than in my legs."

"All right, then; here we go."

They went quickly down the slope which led to the osier-bed, but it took a good while to get to the place, though James strode along as fast as he could. Richard laughed, half in pleasure, half in fear, at being thus rapidly carried on James's back. At length they reached the desired spot. James laid down his burden upon the grass, wiped his forehead, and then, taking off his coat, spread it on the ground for fear Richard should find it damp. When he had settled him comfortably on this new sort of carpet, he said, "Now, here we are; what would you like next?"

Richard looked around him with great delight. He was close to the tall poplar, and its shadow just reached his feet. He could almost count the leaves of the poor little shrub he had so often looked at from a distance. Presently he asked James to go and find him some forget-me-nots by the water's edge.

James could not find any, however, for the season was over. He searched in vain all up and down the banks. He could find nothing flowering but some meadow-sweet, growing in the midst of a clump of reeds. He next gathered a quantity of the long flexible osier boughs, and began to carve them skilfully with his pen-knife, cutting the soft bark away in all sorts of fanciful figures. Then he handed Richard the pretty wands, all covered with green and white patterns, and Richard was never tired of admiring.

At length, after a long silence, during which Richard had been looking about him dreamily, he said, with a sigh, "James, I almost wish I

had never come here. This always seemed to me like a bit of enchanted land, where I should discover all sorts of marvellous things if I could only get to it, and now I have come and seen it, after all, I find it is like other places."

"You could see from where you were that there were only trees and grass, and a little water here," replied James, laughing.

"Yes, but I used to fancy all sorts of marvellous flowers growing out of sight. Are you never sad, James?"

"When I think of my mother I am, but I should not be sad if I were like you."

"Not sad if you were like me? if you couldn't walk, like me?"

"No," said James, very decidedly; "for then I could learn, and I like that very much."

"Learn what?"

"Oh, all the things there are in those beautiful books that you always have by you."

"You don't know how to read, then?" asked Richard, in surprise, for he almost thought people learned to read as they learn to speak.

“Just a little I do, but it takes me a long while to get down a page, and sometimes, when I get to the last word in the sentence, I have forgotten the first.”

“Well, you shall come and read to me half an hour every day, if you like, till you can read quite easily.”

“Oh, thank you,” said James, with sparkling eyes. “Now I will go and get some more willow boughs, and you shall see what I can do.”

He got up and ran from tree to tree, choosing out boughs of exactly the same size. Richard followed his movements with curious delight. Far from being envious of his activity, and strength, and nimbleness, he liked to watch him, and the thought that he could teach something to a being so superior to him in other respects, that he could make James a sharer in a good he did not yet possess, gave the crippled child a sense of satisfaction which reconciled him to his lot. James was, as we have said, tall, slight,

and thin ; he was a well-made, striking-looking boy. Without really regular features, his face was pleasant to look at ; his large, soft, dark eyes were perfectly frank and truthful, and at the same time bespoke a quick intelligence. He had that native dignity which comes from a good conscience, and an earnest desire to do right. How many fathers would have been proud of such a son ! But he, poor lad, had no father to be proud of him, no mother to love him !

When he had found all he wanted, James sat down again by Richard's side, and tried to make a basket, as he had seen the basket-maker do in the village. Richard meanwhile stretched himself out on the grass, and rested his head on James's knees.

" Oh, how nice this is ! " he said, with a sigh of satisfaction. " I can fancy we two are alone in a little boat, in the midst of a great sea, with no shore to be seen on any side. It is so still, — so still, — that we cannot feel any motion of the waves. And we are so happy that we do not

even wish to float near to land, or to discover one little sail on the horizon. We look up, and there over our heads is the great, deep, calm, blue heaven; it seems as if we might go up, and up, and up forever. And below us is the deep, deep sea, without a bottom or a shore."

Richard spoke so gravely and earnestly that even James was for a little while carried away by his words, and they both fancied they were out on a charmed ocean, being drifted along by the quiet waves, like a raft in a current.

They never noticed how the time was passing, and the last rays of the sun had already faded in the west, when James suddenly felt Richard shiver and tremble from head to foot.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, I am so cold, and I feel so strange. James, I quite forgot that papa told me never to stay out after the sun was gone down. I'm afraid he will be so angry. Do let us go back quickly."

Much as James tried he could not get back,

with Richard in his arms, as quickly as he had come with him on his shoulders. The ground sloped up, too, instead of down, and it was much harder work. Still he never stopped, till panting and breathless he reached the dining-room door. M. Lassalles, who had become uneasy about Richard, had seen the two coming, and was prepared to blame the boys for being so thoughtless; but the words were checked on his lips, as on going up to Richard he saw that he had fainted, and was lying utterly powerless in James's arms.





CHAPTER V.

THE dampness of the autumn evening air, and the exhalations of the marshy meadows had seized the poor delicate child, and for two or three days he lay very ill.

As soon as he recovered consciousness he asked for James, and begged to have him with him. James must give him his medicines, and no one but James could amuse him. M. Lassalles made no objection to the boy's presence, and from that time he never left Richard's room. Mademoiselle Leblois and Juliet were amazed at Richard's fancy for a little beggar-boy, and did not at all approve of his being allowed to take the place of one of the members of the family by the sick-

bed. They had, indeed, no forwardness on James's part to complain of, for whenever they went into the room he retired directly to the farthest corner ; but if Richard noticed it he always called him back. The poor child still suffered much, and no one ventured to oppose his wishes.

Had the lookers on been kindly disposed, or even simply just to James, they must have remarked the self-forgetfulness, presence of mind, gentleness, and patience, which made him such a pleasant nurse and companion to the little invalid. But they were too much prejudiced to be just. No one but M. Lassalles noticed all this, and he said nothing.

One day Richard, on arousing from a heavy doze, looked long and steadily at James, who was sitting at the foot of the bed, and did not know his little patient was awake.

"How good you are to me," Richard said suddenly. "I do love you."

"I do not see why you should call me good,"

replied James; "but if I know how to do any thing right I owe it to my mother. She taught me to love God, and to do as I would be done by."

"Do you really love God?" asked Richard; "you can't know much about Him."

"I can see His good hand all around me," James answered; "and then when my mother was alive, I saw how gentle, and patient and good she was; and I knew it was God who put it into her heart. When I feel sad and lonely it makes me happier to think of God, who loves us so well, and is never far away from us."

The two boys spent much time talking in this way in the bedroom. Very different scenes meanwhile were passing below. Robert had hardly troubled to come to see his sick brother even once a day, and had shown not the slightest care or concern about him. The only companion he cared for was his father's new groom. M. Lassalles had repeatedly told him how much he disapproved of this intimacy, but Robert paid no

attention to his words, and had even rudely answered one day that he should be bored to death at home if it were not for Philip's company.

He became daily more insolent, coarse, and sullen in his behavior to his own family. The groom kept him in a state of perpetual irritation by telling him of the horses and the meets of the last young master he had lived with, who was not older than Robert, but had his own guns, dogs and horses. Robert felt himself aggrieved, and treated like a child, because he had only his old pony to ride. His ill-humor fell principally on James, to whom he gave an insolent word whenever he was out of his father's hearing.

"What a pity it is, Master Robert," said Philip, "that your father won't let you hunt. Not many young gentlemen of your age are so obedient as you. M. Arthur wouldn't have submitted to be kept like a caged bird with his wings clipped, I know."

"I have told you often enough, Philip," Robert replied, pettishly, "that my father saw

a dreadful accident happen to one of his brothers when he was young, and out hunting ; and ever since then he cannot bear the name of field sports."

"But that's no reason why you shouldn't go shooting, Master Robert. If we had a gun we might set off together, and nobody be any the wiser."

"Ah, if I only had a gun!" sighed Robert.

"I saw a splendid one the other day, — such a bargain. You give me a hundred francs and I'll get it for you this very night," said Philip.

"A hundred francs ! but I haven't got them. I have only twenty left in my purse."

"Ask your father. He is rich enough to let you have as much as you want."

Such conversations passed repeatedly till the wish to possess the splendid gun took such hold of Robert that he could think of nothing else. Such a desire becomes a terrible temptation to an ill-regulated mind like Robert's. He had no strength better than his own to keep him from

evil, — for he never prayed, and the thought of God had no place in his heart.

One day Richard having passed a bad night, fell asleep in the afternoon, and his faithful attendant worn out too, dropped off himself, with his head resting on the foot of the bed. While they were both sleeping, Robert came into the room to see if he had left his knife there the evening before. His eye fell at once upon a bank-note lying on the table. It was for one hundred francs. Just the price of the gun! Who would be the wiser if he took it? Richard's little pale face lay motionless on the pillow. James's head was buried in the counterpane; both were breathing heavily. The temptation was strong. Robert caught up the note, slipped it into his pocket, and trembling all over, glided out of the room on tiptoe lest the slightest sound should awake one of the sleepers. He had reached the door, and was just turning to shut it, when he started to see James's eyes fixed upon him with a steady, searching gaze. Had

he been seen? Would he be suspected? Oh, how he detested that boy who had been acting the spy, perhaps, and would betray him.

The links which form the heavy chain of sin are quickly forged. The thought that the suspicion of the theft might easily be made to fall on James himself flashed into Robert's mind, and he welcomed it.

A few moments after M. Lassalles came into the room. Richard had just awoke.

"Did I not leave a bank-note here?" M. Lassalles asked. "I think it must have fallen out of my pocket-book when I opened it. If it is not here I do not know where to look."

"Oh, yes, papa," said Richard; "we found it a moment after you were gone out, and put it here on the table for you. James, where is it?"

But James was looking in vain. The bank-note was not where they had put it. He could not help recalling Robert's startled look as he had suddenly woke up, and seen him leaving the room.

"Has any one been in since I was here?" asked M. Lassalles.

"No, papa, nobody."

James did not contradict the words. How could he throw suspicion on the son of his benefactor? And then he really could not believe Robert would be capable of such an act. The bank-note would certainly be found. He went on seeking. M. Lassalles watched him with a troubled countenance. But the search was utterly vain; the bank-note was gone beyond a doubt. M. Lassalles, fearing to agitate the little invalid, left the room without a word. A few minutes after James was sent for, and did not come back.

It was not a mere suspicion which rested upon the poor lad. M. Lassalles thought his guilt was clear. It cost him much to renounce the trust he had placed in the honest open countenance of the orphan boy. But who has not been deceived by appearances? How often does vice put on the garb of virtue!

“Anselm was right,” said M. Lassalles to himself, as he walked slowly towards the gardeners’s cottage; “I was very imprudent in taking such a boy into the house, and allowing him to be friendly with my son. How difficult it is to act wisely.”

James had gone up to the little room he used to occupy before he became Richard’s companion. Anselm, contrary to custom, was standing at the door of his cottage, with his hands behind him, and a very grave look on his face.

“You know what has happened, Anselm,” said his master.

“I know what is said,” replied the gardener gloomily.

“And you do not believe it?” asked M. Lassalles, in a surprised tone. “Why, you always thought badly of the boy.”

“Sir,” said the old man, with the calmness given by strong conviction, “I know that boy well now, and I am certain he is not guilty.”

After leaving Anselm, M. Lassalles returned

to Richard's room. He found him weeping bitterly, and deaf to all the arguments of his sister and her governess.

"It is a wicked shame!" he repeated again and again. "Why not accuse me? I was in the room as well as James."

"It is very painful to me to accuse James," said M. Lassalles, "but you must understand that I should still less think of suspecting my own son. Beside, my poor child, do you want us to suppose that you got up out of your bed to hide the note, when we know you cannot stand? No, my little man, you cannot take it upon your self."

Richard buried his face in the clothes and sobbed.

"He loved me so, and was so kind to me, and did everything for me, and now this is how they treat him. Oh, James! James! If I could only tell him that I know he did not do it."

Two days passed away, and Robert, whom no one suspected, was certainly the most miserable

of all. He had not had a moment's peace since he had touched the fatal note. He had locked it up in a drawer and carried the key always in his pocket, but it seemed to burn him every time he felt it was there. Twenty times he was on the point of secretly putting the note back in his father's desk, but he dared not. How could it be explained? Oh, if he had only known what wretchedness that sin would cost him.

As he was walking alone in the park one evening, anxious to avoid everybody's eyes, and yet half frightened to be alone, feeling an Eye upon him all the while which he could not escape, and which read him through and through, he suddenly found himself face to face with James.

"What do you want here?" said Robert, who trembled violently when he saw him. James was very pale and hollow-eyed; it was plain that he had been suffering terribly.

"Mr. Robert," he said, "tell the truth to your father. Do, I implore you! You know you

cannot hide it from God, and you cannot forgive yourself."

"What do you mean?" said Robert, passionately. "Leave me alone. I don't know what you want with me."

"Yes, you do know. But perhaps you do not understand all the harm you are doing me in letting me be suspected of this theft. I have stayed here till now, because I hoped you would speak. I never thought you could—— But to-morrow I shall go."

His courage broke down as he said these words, and with a voice broken by sobs, he added — "I shall go, and they will think me guilty. Even Richard will think so. Oh God, what shall I do?"

Through the whole night after this conversation, Robert could not sleep a wink. He had always before him James's white face and reproachful look. He kept hearing the heart-broken tone of his last words.

"I cannot hide it from God," he said to him-

self, "and I cannot forgive myself. It is true, it is true;" and he found not a moment's peace till he had taken the firm resolve to go to his father as soon as it was day, and confess all. We will not describe what followed that confession. It was an hour never to be forgotten in Robert's life, when, humbled and penitent as he was, he heard his father tell him that he loved him still, and had more hope of him now than he had had for many a day.

How shall we describe either, the meeting between Richard and James? James had already packed up his little bundle and was just about to start, when he was sent for to M. Lassalles. His master gave him a strong grasp of the hand, and then led him to Richard's bedside.

"I never believed it for one instant," whispered Richard, as in an ecstasy of delight he clasped his arms round James's neck.

Presently Robert came in. He looked very pale, and did not lift his eyes to James's face as he held out his hand and asked him in a scarcely

audible voice to forgive him the wrong he had done. James seized the offered hand, and pressed it between his own, which trembled with joy, while his eyes were full of tears. From that moment the proud young master and the honest serving-lad were trusty friends.

It was decided that James should go on working under Anselm's orders, but at the same time he was to spend some hours each day under Richard's teaching. Thus his two great desires were fulfilled; he learned the mystery of books, and at the same time he proved the higher joy of loving and being beloved.



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